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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [PREL](#) [IN](#)
SUBJECT: ABBAS VISIT TO INDIA REAFFIRMS INDIAN SUPPORT FOR
PALESTINE

Classified By: A/PolCouns Pushpinder Dhillon for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

11. (C) Summary. President Mahmoud Abbas' October 6-9 visit to India was highlighted by:

- an explicit Indian reaffirmation of support to the Palestinian cause for a sovereign, independent, viable and united state;
- \$20 million in aid, including \$10 million for budgetary support and \$10 million for development programs;
- the inauguration of a new Palestinian Embassy in Delhi; and
- India's perception that it is playing a substantive, supportive role in the Middle East Peace Process.

Abbas was afforded a state visit, and his meetings included President Patil, Prime Minister Singh, Vice President Ansari, Sonia Gandhi, opposition leader L.K. Advani, and Minister of State for External Affairs E. Ahamed. Abbas' main message to his India counterparts was that while the Peace Process has moved more slowly than he had hoped, he was still positive that an outcome could be achieved within a year. End Summary.

What Abbas Got: Explicit Support, \$20 Million, an Embassy and a School

12. (C) Palestinian Authority President Ahmoud Abbas, accompanied by Foreign Minister Riyad Al-Malki, Official Spokesman Nabil Abu Rdeineh and Advisor to the President Ziad Abu 'Amr, visited New Delhi on a state visit October 6-9. Dr. Suhel Ajaz Khan, Ministry of External Affairs Deputy Secretary for West Asia and North Africa, briefed Poloff that Abbas' visit was held in an exceptionally cordial atmosphere, and included meetings with President Patil, Prime Minister Singh, Vice President Ansari, party leaders Sonia Gandhi and L.K. Advani, and Minister of State E. Ahamed. Discussions centered around India's support for the Palestinian cause, Khan reported, with Prime Minister Singh stating publicly during the visit that he "reiterated to Presqdent Abbas India's consistent support to a negotiated solution to the Palestine issue."

13. (C) India's support went beyond words during this visit,

however. PM Singh also announced India would be donating a new \$20 million to the Palestinian Authority, with \$10 million being earmarked for budgetary support, and an additional \$10 million targeted for development projects. Khan clarified that this \$20 million was completely new funding, separate from the \$15 million in project assistance declared in 2005 and the \$5 million announced in 2007. When asked by Poloff about specifics of how the budget money would be delivered (i.e., through UN Relief Works Agency?) and to what types of development projects, Khan said he was unsure of specific modalities, but assumed it would go through "normal channels." He added India would form a committee with the Palestinians to discuss and decide the best way to use the \$10 million for development projects.

14. (C) India also handed Abbas two other deliverables: 1) Abbas inaugurated the new Palestinian embassy, where he laid the foundation stone on property granted to the PA by the Indian government in Delhi's swanky diplomatic enclave, offering an upgrade in prestige when compared to the current chancery in a residential area; and 2) a memorandum of understanding for the construction of a new high school in Abu Dees, to be named the Jawaharlal Nehru High School in honor of India's first prime minister. Khan explained that both of these structures are being financed by the 2005 and 2007 pledges.

What India Got: Abbas' Take On MEPP, a Role From The "Sidelines," and Domestic Political Points

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15. (C) Khan revealed to Poloff that India's goal for the visit was to draw out Abbas' views on the Peace Process, in addition to offering India's aid/support. Abbas, Khan stated, told his Indian interlocutors that while progress in the Peace Process had been slower than he had expected following the Annapolis Conference, he was still "hopeful that something could be worked out, perhaps within a year's time." Abbas emphasized that he had believed after Annapolis that an outcome would be possible by the end of 2008, and while he now had adjusted his timetable, still felt a breakthrough was achievable in the short term, according to Khan.

16. (C) Khan said he believed the Indian government demonstrated both at the Annapolis Conference and with the Abbas visit that, "while still on the sidelines," it could play a constructive role in the Peace Process. Citing India's historic relations with the Palestinian Liberation Organization, including according diplomatic status to Palestine in 1980, coupled with its healthy relationship with Israel, Khan maintained that India is seen by both Arabs and Israelis as a "neutral" figure, widely respected by both sides. India realizes its role is limited, Khan offered, but feels for the first time, thanks to the invitation to Annapolis, that it is "on the inside."

17. (C) What no Indian official would be willing to admit, but what Jawaharlal Nehru University professor P. R. Kumaraswamy claimed to Poloff was obvious, is that Abbas' visit was conveniently timed for PM Singh and the Congress government, who rely on the Muslim voting bloc for support, and who face general elections no later than May 2009. According to Kumaraswamy, with the Congress Party facing criticism from Muslim and Left quarters for getting "too close" to the U.S., this visit (along with an expected visit in November by President Mubarak, he added) builds Congress' street credentials for maintaining an "independent" foreign policy.

Comment: "Neutral" India Able To Support U.S. Goals On MEPP

18. (C) Comment. President Abbas' visit to Delhi was significant for the reaffirmation of Indian support for a

Palestinian state, as well as for some much needed budgetary support. It is also potentially good news for U.S. interests, as we attempt to transform our new-found strategic relations with India into more of a global partnership. As Khan suggested, India feels as though our invitation to Annapolis granted it a level of legitimacy for its involvement in MEPP, and India feels it has a small but helpful role to play as a neutral facilitator. We should welcome India's positive involvement, and keep open for consideration other ways to leverage Delhi's influence in the process.

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